

READING TIBETAN IN THE ORIGINAL CHINESE: TIBETAN SINOPHONE AUTHORS AND TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary China, Tibetan literature is classified as a distinct branch of Chinese literature and, in recent decades, writers from Tibetan regions have increasingly used Chinese script in their literary compositions. This has led some to question the cultural authenticity of Tibetan literature in Chinese. This article suggests that we should not confuse script and language; that stories written in Chinese can still make use of Tibetan words via certain translational strategies. A number of Sinophone Tibetan authors on the periphery effectively use Tibetan language in their writing, creating a Tibetan intellectual world by way of phonetic and semantic translation, and at the same time show how standard Chinese can be hybridized in a way that makes it possible to read the Tibetan behind the Chinese.

KEYWORDS

cultural translation, hybridity, literature in China, minority literature, Sinophone, Tibetan literature

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INTRODUCTION

Can literature written in Tibetan and Chinese ever convey "identical" meaning? The field of translation studies could be said to be founded upon the idea that any immaculate transfer between languages is impossible.¹ We know that no two words from different languages can ever be truly equivalent, for there is always some connotation, some common or obscure usage or potential play on words that can cause meaning to divert in myriad directions. Roman Jakobson defined the three major types of translation as intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic, the second being the process of transfer from a source to a target language, but immediately followed this schema by questioning the possibility of equivalence: "The intralingual translation of a word uses either another, more or less synonymous, word or resorts to circumlocution. Yet synonymy, as a rule, is not complete equivalence" (Jakobson 1959:233). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that complete equivalence exists between the Tibetan translation and original Chinese versions of the story *Purple Highland Barley* (Chinese: *Zi qingke*, Tibetan: '*Bru smug po*') by Nima Panduo: to wit, "The ideas and meaning in the Tibetan and Chinese version are identical" (Pad+ma rig 'dzin 2018:309). This quote comes from an excellent review published in this journal by the independent scholar Pad+ma rig 'dzin, where we see a comparison between an "original"

¹ One of the first prominent translation studies theoreticians, JC Catford (1917-2009), wrote what could be described an early refutation of true meaning transfer in the translation process: "In translation, there is substitution of TL [target language] meaning for SL [source language] meanings: not transference of SL meanings into the TL" (Catford 1965:48). The use of the term "substitution" instead of transfer suggests that in translation there is an implantation of one meaning in the place of another.

(and I put this word in quotation marks because the *true* original is not necessarily discernible in situations of widespread bilingualism and language mixing)¹ of a story about Tibet by a Tibetan author and published in Chinese in 2010, and the Tibetan language translation that followed in 2011.

Another translation of the same novel, this time into English, was later published in 2016, a rendition that is not without its accuracy problems,² as Pad+ma rig 'dzin notes. The reported failure of the English version to better convey the meaning of the Tibetan leads us to further question how the Chinese and Tibetan versions can be considered so identical. The answer may be that perhaps the "source" language (in this case Chinese) was not entirely *Chinese* to begin with, or else the ideas would not transfer so perfectly. In other words, the reason the translation works so well is that the text was already a hybrid, translational text interweaving Tibetan and Chinese language *before* the actual translator came along. Tibetan stories written in Chinese belong to the category of Sinophone writing, a form of writing that, while ostensibly Chinese, often includes elements from other languages, and in the case of Sinophone writing within China, displays hybridity between the dominant written form of standard Chinese and

¹ In the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) for example, there have been alternating educational policies concerning the medium of instruction in schools, with some primary schools teaching in Tibetan and others in Mandarin Chinese. Recent years have seen an increasing emphasis on Chinese-language instruction (see Tsung 2014:129). In situations such as these, where the "first" language is hard to gauge, and as a consequence bilingualism prevails in all aspect of cultural life, a work written in Chinese is not necessarily solely and originally Chinese.

² These include names in non-standard romanization, incorrect Chinese-derived romanizations, and several instances of inaccurate translation of culture-specific words (see Pad+ma rig 'dzin 2018:308-309).

a vast network of minority languages. To what extent, then, can we see the Tibetan language in these Chinese works?

SINOPHONE WRITING

While the term "Sinophone" can refer to Sinitic languages as they are spoken or written across the global diaspora, I apply it here to specifically "peoples and their cultures - now national minority peoples or, in the official lingo, 'minority nationalities' - within the nation-state of China" (Shih 2013:3). According to official state classification, China has fifty-six ethnic groups and fifty-five minorities, that includes the Tibetans as one distinct group. All these ethnic groups have oral traditions, while some, like the Tibetans, have their own native writing systems and written literary traditions that date back centuries. The first appearance of *minzu wenzue* 'ethnic minority literature' as a category in itself can be traced back to the inaugural issue of the journal, *Renmin wenzue* 'People's Literature', in September 1949.¹ From the 1950s, as China's Ethnic Classification Project got underway, this category began to be explored, as scholars asked questions that are to this day still the subject of debate, such as: "What is ethnic minority literature? What is an ethnic minority writer? What purpose does ethnic minority literature serve?" (Bender 2015:262). In contemporary China, ethnic minority literature is a distinct branch of Chinese literature defined as writing composed by officially-recognized ethnic minorities: there is no distinction based upon language. In recent

¹ Chinese scholar Li Xiaofeng discusses this issue in detail (Li 2017).

decades, writers from China's ethnic minorities (such as the Tibetans Alai, Meizhuo, Yidam Tsering, and Tashi Dawa) have increasingly used Chinese script for their literary compositions. Chinese texts have wide circulation in China, whereas texts written in Tibetan, or other minority scripts, are automatically constricted to a much smaller readership.

Yang Zhengwen, a Naxi minority writer from Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in the foothills of the Himalayas, has very articulately encapsulated the dilemma faced by China's minorities when it comes to literary creation. This is a dilemma so important that I believe it is worth recounting his thoughts on this topic in full (and because they were originally printed as a postscript to a very obscure piece of ethnic minority fiction):

我在近四十年的写作历程中，尤其碰到创作小说时，常常会有这样的疑惑：在表现纳西族尤其是其古老支系纳罕人时，就有一个怎么写的问题。。。要写到人物对话时就有些为难了：究竟是让他说一口流利的汉语呢？还是让他半通不通地说些颠三倒四的汉语？或是让他按纳罕语一说到底？如此，究竟如何翻译好？

我们国家是个大家庭，有五十六位情同手足的兄弟。除汉族老大哥是主体民族外，其余五十个都是少数民族。每个兄弟民族中都有几位，几十位乃至几百位作家。他们中除少数作家能用本民族语言文字写作外，绝大多数要用汉语言文字写作。因此，用汉语言文字创作民族题材的小说，可以说是共性。

Over the past forty years of my writing career, especially when writing novels, I have often encountered the following uncertainty – when relating the stories of the Naxi people, especially those of the ancient branch of

the Naxi, the Nahan, the problem of how to write crops up ... when writing a dialogue, it's tricky: do you make them speak in fluent Chinese? Or in faltering, topsy-turvy Chinese? Or just make them speak Nahan from start to finish? And if so, how do you translate it?

Our country is one big family, with fifty-six closely-knit brothers. Apart from the Han, who are the big, elder brother, the other fifty-five are the ethnic minority groups. Among the minority brethren each group has one or two, perhaps dozens, even hundreds of writers. Aside from the minority among them who can write in their own ethnic scripts, the overwhelming majority must use Chinese script to write. In this way, using Chinese to create novels on minority topics can be said to be a commonality (Yang 2015:13).

Yang Zhengwen is a Naxi author living in a primarily Tibetan region. He writes specifically about one particular sub-branch of his own ethnic group,¹ but the questions he raises are universal for minorities in China; questions that are the heart of this paper. How do China's minority writers, in particular the Tibetans, write their stories in Chinese? What language do they use, and if they use multiple languages, how do they translate between them?

After the 1950s, Tibetan literature bifurcated into two main directions: Tibetan literature written in Tibetan (usually standard literary Tibetan) and ethnic Tibetan literature written in Chinese. This has led to debates, as described in Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani (2008) about true "Tibetanness," with the question over whether texts written in Chinese can properly represent Tibet. The 1980s saw the rapid

¹ In this case, the officially unrecognized "Nahan" people who inhabit Sanba Township of Xianggelila Municipality.

development of modern Tibetan literature, yet some of the most established Tibetan authors are not fully recognized as Tibetan by the Tibetan community, as Tséring Shakya has attested (2001:xix). There is a conceptual model, then, that suggests while some Tibetans write in Tibetan and others in Chinese, writing in Tibetan is somehow believed to be more authentically Tibetan. I wish to posit here the existence of a third category: while it is of course eminently possible for Tibetans to completely adopt Chinese script and language, there is also the possibility of using Sinitic graphs to represent Tibetan words, within a framework of a Chinese language text. This kind of language use suggests a hybrid form of writing.

In the discourse surrounding Sinophone Tibetan literature, and all minority literature in China, there has been a consistent failure to distinguish between language and script. Script is taken as language. Just because something is written in Chinese script does not mean that Tibetan language is entirely absent. Going back to the novel mentioned in the introduction, *Purple Highland Barley*, the reviewer Pad+ma rig 'dzin gives some examples of Tibetan words appearing in the original Chinese, depicted via phonetic transcriptions followed by translations in standard Chinese. Representative of these Tibetan elements include phrases such as:

- 羊毛精织的'协玛'（最上等的氆氇）[Finely knitted woolen *shad ma* 'Tibetan wool of the highest class']¹
- 钦点(神物), *byin rten* 'sacred relics'

¹ In translating examples, I transfer all Chinese language into English, and use Wylie to transcribe Tibetan. All translations are my own, except where otherwise specified.

"Finely knitted woolen *shad ma*" is obviously not entirely an English noun phrase, for the noun itself is a Tibetan word. In such cases, the translator transferring the story into Tibetan is essentially dealing with back translation: these terms have already been translated *out of* Tibetan, so the transfer back into Tibetan should prove painless.

Such examples show how minority writers can be seen to choose certain elements of their native culture to carry across in their dominant-language writing. This process is all the more noticeable if their intended readership is primarily made up of international or dominant-culture readers (Tymoczko 1999:24). While translation scholars such as Maria Tymoczko have primarily described postcolonial authors, we can see in the Sinophone writing of authors from China's ethnic minorities an attempt at transferring the cultural metatext of their traditional culture to a target, dominant-culture readership. The idea of ethnicity in the minority context is, however, very much subjective, and as Harrell (1996) has indicated, ethnic identities are "negotiated" by numerous groups with often conflicting interests. Translation, or translational writing, is one particular tool used by these groups to negotiate ethnicity. Traditionally, translation has been conceived of as a practice that is restricted to interlingual transfer: a translator takes a text in one language and transforms it into a text in a second language. Sometimes, however, the line between author and translator can be blurred. Tibetan writers who write in Chinese are themselves creators of translational texts, works of literature that exist in a space between languages. Hassan has specifically conceptualized "translational literature" as works that problematize translation and the notion of an original, as they are

original texts within which cultural translation is already being performed:

In the space between translators and translated, there are texts that straddle two languages...they participate in the construction of cultural identities from that in-between space and raise many of the questions that preoccupy contemporary translation theory (Hassan 2006, 754).

Works of original creation can then also become works of translation, because the minority author is always already a translator. The postcolonial and/or minority writer who wishes to transfer the metatext of their native culture into the language of the dominant culture can use a number of translational strategies. In the Chinese context, the most common are glossing and "non-translation." Examples of these strategies as used by postcolonial African writers have been explained in great detail by Tymoczko (1999), and Ashcroft has expanded upon these strategies to include other linguistic approaches such as syntactic fusion. In China, perhaps for reasons of comprehension and conformity, the primary strategy is simple glossing.

The Tibetan words inserted into Chinese writing can be divided into two major categories: those which are culturally-specific, and those which are not. A culture-specific lexical item, to adopt Mona Baker's definition, is "abstract or concrete, it may relate to a religious belief, a social custom, or even a type of food" (1992: 21). An example in Tibetan Sinophone literature might be 扎巴 *zhaba*; གྲྫ རྒྱା བା *grwa ba*, either glossed in Chinese as "ordinary Buddhist monk" or left untranslated), which can be found in works by several Sinophone Tibetan authors (e.g., Liangjiong Langsa 2006 and Dazhen 2009). This

word denotes the lowest ecclesiastical rank, for which there is no direct equivalent in Chinese, hence the gloss explanation. In contrast, non-culture-specific items are common across languages.

An example from *Yinbi de lian 'Hidden Face'* by Tibetan author Gerong Zhuimei: "她會說：'阿多（啊，看），某某，別裝出無辜的樣子，給我倒一碗酒來'" [She would say " 'a, ltos (oh, look), whoever, don't act all innocent, go fetch me a bowl of wine"] (Gerong Zhuimei 2011:250). Here the Tibetan verb "look" is transcribed in Chinese (*a duo*) and glossed in with a simple equivalent: there is actually no need to use the Tibetan if one simply wants to convey the meaning of "look," but its usage is an appeal to Tibetan identity, a strategy deployed in answer to the uncertainty posed by the writing of minority language dialogue.

It may be hypothesized that an analysis of the use of Tibetan words will mostly reveal transcriptions of culturally-specific items (e.g., plants, animals, religious terminology, etc.) and that this would entail a lack of choice on the author's part, thus making for unconvincing evidence of hybridization. Certain words simply do not exist in Chinese, so the author will have no choice but to invent transcriptions for them. Even so, the use of words such as 扎巴 (*zhaba*) are of note in that, with repeated usage, they present possible additions to the Chinese lexicon. Non-culture-specific terms are indeed more useful for demonstrating hybrid forms of writing, however.

My research into the Tibetan Sinophone literature has so far identified over 600 glossed Tibetan words and phrases in Chinese, and almost half of these are non-culture-specific lexical items such as common nouns and action verbs. The choice involved in the "look" example above is obvious: the author could have simply used the

Chinese verb *kan* 看 (as in the gloss), but instead chooses to use the Tibetan word in Chinese transcription, followed by a translation. These conscious decisions do not necessarily reflect a crisis of identity or some kind of postcolonial struggle, but they do show an awareness that linguistic difference is a marker of a distinct ethnic identity.

WRITING FROM THE PERIPHERY

Tibetan author Alai (A le) is perhaps the most well-known of China's contemporary Sinophone Tibetan writers. His writing, and that of all minority Sinophone authors, belongs to what Deleuze and Guattari (1986:16-17) call "minor literature," which "does not come from a minor language; it is rather a minority construct within a major language." Minor literature has, in their definition, three characteristics: "the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (*ibid* 18). All three aspects here are relevant to Tibetans writing in Chinese. It is a paradox that works of minor literature can accrue a collective value as representative of a wider culture, and the political nature of writing in a context as heavily politicized as ethnicity, identity, and state control cannot be denied. I would, however, like to focus on the aspect of language. What language are these writers using exactly, and how can it be said to "deterritorialize"? Alai himself has written that minority authors can hybridize Chinese: "When [minority writers] use this common language of 'Han Chinese' or 'Mandarin', we bring some aesthetic feeling or mode of expression from our own original regional

language, or different ethnic languages into it, making it richer, and bringing change to the language" (Alai 2014:11). It is this change that I want to address, change that is embodied by the use of translational language. Tibetan is, of course, not a monolithic language. The temptation is to see all Tibetan words in Chinese language work as representing a Lhasa dialect, but these words can also reflect dialect differences. Take the simple noun, "friend." While this could easily be expressed with the Chinese word, *pengyou*, in two distinct examples of Tibetan Sinophone literature we get two different words for friend. First, take Jamyang Sherab's 2003 novel, *Xizang zuihou de tuo dui* 'Tibet's Last Yak Caravan Train'¹:

阿若，①阿若：昌都方言，意思是朋友。一口想吃个胖子没有门，懂吗？！

[*A rogs*, ① *a rogs*: Changdu dialect, meaning 'friend'. Don't you know that there's no way you can get fat in one bite?!] (2003:176-177)

In this example, we see the word 阿若 *a ruo*, which is clearly a rendition of the Tibetan *a rogs*, used in the dialogue. The intratextual footnote (which appears within the text, not at the bottom of the page) suggests that this is Chab mdo dialect. Another example of "friend"

¹ Jamyang Sherab's novel features widespread use of Tibetan language in Chinese transcription. A thematic focus is the unique language belonging to the saltmen of Tibet, so one would expect actual language used within the book to reflect the reality on the ground. There are instances where he introduces complete, syntactic sentences in the dialect of the saltmen, and deconstructs them by stating which words are Tibetan borrowings, which are coined neologisms, and what the Chinese meaning of the terms are. All of this is written via phonetic transcriptions in Chinese (see for example Jamyang Sherab 2003: 52).

would be the more literary term for an intimate friend found in ancient texts, *mdza'bo*, and that also appears in Chinese transcription in Sina Jundeng's work:

"放心，那是我最好的沙普（藏语：朋友之意），他会照顾好的"

[Don't worry, that's my best *mdza'bo* (Tibetan, meaning 'friend'), he'll look after you] (Sina Jundeng 2017:151)

This time the gloss comes in the familiar parenthesis, and once again, within dialogue, the writer makes a claim for the ethnic authenticity of their Tibetan characters via the introduction of Tibetan language. A further example of dialect words in transcription can be seen in the work of Meizhuo:

篝火点燃了傍晚，青年男女围在火旁跳起了卓，卓是一种舞蹈的名字
[The bonfire lit up the evening. Around the fire, young men and women danced the *bro* - *bro* being the name of a kind of dance] (Meizhuo 1995:388)

Here the gloss comes within the narrative itself, no footnote, no parenthesis, a direct explanation of this word, *bro* (transcribed in the text via the Chinese *zhuo*, a type of dance from Eastern Tibet),¹ that serves as a marker of the local culture of the author's native A mdo, where the novel takes place.

¹ In her novel, Meizhuo states that *bro* is a type of dance. *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary* specifically calls it "a type of dance from Eastern Tibet" (Goldstein 2001:742). However, *bro* can also be used more generally to simply mean "dance," as in Jäschke (1998:382).

Alai is a mainstream author who makes sparing use of glossing (one rare example from his most famous work, *Chen'ai Luoding*, would be *xiari*, which is glossed simply as "bones" (Alai 2000:11), but is actually a Chinese transcription of the Tibetan *sha rus* 'flesh and bone'). Such examples are few and far between in Alai's oeuvre. But more extensive examples of translation can be found in the writing of other Tibetan authors on the periphery. In the border regions, we can find the best examples of hybrid, translational writing, but they come from the less mainstream authors: those on the metaphorical periphery of the literary scene, whose primary concern may not be sales figures and readership, but rather to express their unique local cultures. These are writers who dwell on the geographic periphery of the Tibetan lowlands, far from the center of the Tibetan literary sphere in Lhasa. One story I will take several examples from is 萦绕心灵的琴声 *Yingrao xinling de qinsheng* 'Zither Music that Lingers in the Soul', a short piece of fiction by Sina Nongbu, senior editor at the *Diqing Daily* newspaper, that was recently collected in an omnibus of local literature in celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

The protagonist of this story is a college student with a Tibetan mother and a Chinese father in what we presume to be urban Diqing. Like many Tibetans living outside of Tibet proper, she does not read Tibetan, but she can speak it. Throughout the course of the short story she is persuaded of the importance of Tibetan writing via a friend who learns Tibetan to promote Tibetan music and culture. The first example of hybrid writing comes early in the story:

我当时躲在外祖母的怀里，望着阿爸小声好奇地喊：“加¹阿爸，加阿爸”

¹加：汉人

[Back then I'd hide in my grandma's bosom, peek out at daddy and, with quiet curiosity, say, "rgya¹ daddy, rgya daddy"

¹Rgya: Chinese] (2017:5).

Interestingly, the *a ba* here written in Chinese could be an idiomatic way of saying "daddy" in Chinese, or could be a perfect phono-semantic transcription of the Tibetan *a pha* ལྡା, colloquial "daddy." Either way, the Chinese *jia* is most definitely a transcription of the Tibetan *rgya*, meaning Chinese, as the footnote tells us. Another example is the term the Diqing locals would use to describe the protagonist of the story: "人们说我野得像"布"（男儿）" [People said I was wild like a "bu" (boy)] (2017:*ibid*). There is an element of choice here, the author could directly use the Chinese *nan'er* 'boy'); but he does not. The word spoken is Tibetan, *bu*, and the translation is provided to non-Tibetan speakers in the parentheses. The parentheses also work to suggest a difference, a border between the languages that is not necessarily easily crossed. These are Tibetan characters, speaking Tibetan, and we are introduced to this world via these translations.

Further, there are instances where the Tibetan language goes beyond single words:

他们一定会为有自己的第一个藏族教师而感到高兴，就连那些还不会擦鼻涕的小孩也会跳起"生巴永拉尕雄"¹来迎接我。

¹民间弦子名，意为心里十分高兴。

[They will definitely be happy that they have their first ethnic Tibetan teacher, even those kids who can't even wipe their own noses will jump up and dance the "*sems pa yongs la dga' zhing*"¹ to welcome me.

¹Name of a traditional Tibetan folk dance, meaning "Hearts full of rejoicing"] (2017:13).

This is a fully syntactic noun phrase: not a simple, single word, but Tibetan *sems pa yongs la dga' zhing* that needs to be unpacked and translated for the non-Tibetan speaking reader. This phrase actually doubles up as both culture-specific and non-culture-specific, as it is clearly composed of ordinary vocabulary items, but together is the proper name of a specific folk dance. There are yet more examples of hybridity here, in particular a passage that suggests a melding of both scripts, where we can actually see the ligatures of the Tibetan script coming together behind the veil of the Chinese graphs:

我从汉语注释中找出"唱歌"一词，指着藏文请他拼读。他犹豫了一下，接着流利地给我拼了起来—

"嘎拉达拉响窘鲁—， 拉蒸不利那练—， 鲁练巴。"

I found the word "sing" in the Chinese notes and, pointing to the Tibetan writing, asked him to spell it out. He hesitated for a moment, then went on to spell it fluently: "Ga la btags gla zhabs kyu glu; la 'greng bu le na len; glu len pa" (2017:9).

This is semi-translated - we know that this long string of syllables "ga la btags gla zhabs kyu glu; la 'greng bu le na len; glu len pa", means

"to sing" from the immediate context, but we have no idea which part of this is "sing" exactly. In fact, this is the traditional method of spelling out Tibetan words, taking the distinct elements of the stack and adding them together to get the final word. Hence the first syllable *glu* is comprised of *ga*, *a la btags* (subscribed *la*), which together are pronounced *gla*, and, with the *u* vowel, become *glu*. The author also includes the specific, fanciful words for the Tibetan vowels, which are left untranslated: *zhabs kyu* for the *u* vowel, and *'greng bu* for the *e*.

In the following line, the protagonist makes a telling observation:

瞧那挺正经的样子，就像我外婆念经一样，我不禁失声笑开了

[With that serious expression, he looked just like my grandma reciting scripture; I couldn't help but laugh] (*ibid*).

To the uninitiated reader, this arcane string of syllables may as well be a line from a Buddhist sutra; it takes on an almost magical unknown quality, while it is in fact the most mundane practice of spelling out the individual letters of a word. There is no deep meaning behind this Tibetan, just the existence of the Tibetan script, script that is clearly present without being written. What we have in the course of this single story is a mixture of strategies: glossing with brackets and footnotes, combined with some non-translation. These are all translational strategies that are used in the creation of a cultural world, of Tibet and Tibetan, within Chinese writing. The characters are speaking Tibetan, the language comes through despite the façade of Chinese writing. As the example of the spelling of the word "sing"

shows, the Tibetan script exists *behind* the Chinese characters; these graphs are not to be read as the Chinese is read, they are to be read as Tibetan. Essentially, and taken to a logical extreme, this is a mode of writing Tibetan in Chinese orthography.

What purpose does the presence of all this Tibetan serve? It is to create a "Tibetanness" that shines through in the writing despite the Chinese framework. As the protagonist's friend says, upon having successfully learned Tibetan script and presenting a book of traditional Tibetan music to his friend, with added Tibetan notation:

如果能在你们的演出中听到具有民族特色的美的旋律，我就心满意足了

[If I can hear some beautiful melodies with an ethnic flavour in your music, then I'll be satisfied] (2017:16).

The "beautiful melodies" can easily be conceptualized as Tibetan language; the subtext being that literary composition is like musical composition: the writer/composer is not looking for a big publishing deal and the fame and fortune that comes with it, but merely that there is some real "Tibetanness" to the composition.

Together, these examples reveal the ways in which Sinophone writers can "Tibetanize" Chinese. Here I use the word Tibetanize after the way in which Hassan describes the "Arabization" of English in the work of Ahdaf Soueif, a process he notes that is also similar to the "Indianization" of English in the works of Raja Rao (Hassan 206:765), but this Tibetanization is by no means reducible to a monolithic conceptualization of Tibet: Meizhuo's writing is steeped in the culture

of A mdo, while Alai's work often conjures up images of his native Rgyal rong.

It must be stressed that all Sinophone writers who write about their native places engage in some form of translational writing. By transcribing words and expressions, then explaining them in the text, in footnotes, or indeed in not explaining them at all, they are still translating their source culture into Chinese. Tibetan Sinophone writers are not just writers, they are also translators, and they are ethnographers of their own native cultures. Ethnographic translation such as this questions homogenous Tibetan or Chinese identities, introducing peoples, cultures, and histories that are removed from those of mainstream Chinese literature.

"TIBETANNESS"

I will limit my discussion of "Tibetanness" to the use of language in Sinophone writing, specifically of Tibetan language as a marker of numerous cultural identities that are traditionally grouped together as "Tibetan." There have been several studies of Sinophone Tibetan writing in both Chinese and English language scholarship, but they share a marked avoidance of discussing specific examples of translational language. The focus is primarily on the stylistic and thematic content of the writing, and where linguistic elements are analyzed, it is usually only syntactic in nature. Take, for example, the following discussion on Alai's work by Chinese scholar Dan Zhencao:

小说运用了大量结构简洁的句子，这类句子以单句见多，短句子简洁有力，履利灵动，具有独特的艺术魅力

The novel uses a large number of concise sentences; mostly simple in structure, these short sentences are clear and impactful, to the point and vivid, possessing a unique artistic beauty (Dan 2008:126)

An example of this vivid language is given as: "喇嘛的泻药使我的肠子唱起歌来了" "The lama's laxatives made my intestines sing" (*ibid*).

The linguistic analysis focuses primarily on style and imagery, and actually foregoes diction entirely, despite various references to nebulous and subjective ideals of simplicity and purity. The line about laxatives and singing intestines is not particularly Tibetan, despite the existence of the word "lama" that could just as easily have been written by an ethnically Han Chinese author. As is often the case when Chinese commentators discuss Tibetan authors, the above quote suggests an essentialization of Tibetan writing in Chinese as simple and direct, a conceptualization that veers dangerously close to the myth of the noble savage: the suggestion here being something akin to "Look how pure and free from artifice this writing is!" Are all Tibetans who write Chinese condemned to be seen as simplistic in their use of language? The choice of example in itself is revealing, as Alai happens to be a Tibetan author who does not use a lot of Tibetan words, but who is nevertheless taken as an archetype of Tibetan authors who write in Chinese. As I have attempted to show, there are authors who *do* employ glossed Tibetan words (or untranslated Tibetan words), but these writers are regularly overlooked in favor of the more commercially successful in the analyses of Tibetan literature - not

without reason, for they are less visible, and therefore less discussed. Nevertheless, the literary, artistic merit of these works is not necessarily the question that should be addressed when analyzing language; rather the value of this minor literature lies in its use of language and translation to create a hybrid written form.

Wang Yiyan asks important questions about the role of Tibetan Sinophone writing, especially the works of Alai:

How can Alai's Aba retain the significance of other literary native places, such as those of Lu Xun, Shen Congwen, Lao She, and Jia Pingwa, not simply as a local place glowing with historical grandeur and cultural symbols but as the native place for a sense of nationhood? How can ethnics "write back" to the motherland (i.e., challenge the motherland's doctrines about them) in the general context of ethnic politics and in the case of Alai's Tibet in particular? (Wang 2013:104)

On the topic of writing back to the center, of challenging the assumptions that the people of the motherland may have about them, we can see that perhaps one strategy is to employ complex Tibetan language that requires translation, such as gloss explanations. This creation of a hybrid form may go some way toward defying the stereotypes of simplicity. But the creation of hybridity is not without its pitfalls. In a discussion of the Tibet-centric novels of Yangjin Lamu, He Dahai, the editor of *Xianggelila* magazine, suggests that Tibetanness in Chinese literary works must go beyond the surface:

对于小说的创作而言，要让作品真正具备"民族特色"不是件容易做到的事。在常见的一些人的作品当中虽然人物，地名可能都是些"卓玛" "

扎西" "香巴拉" "雪山" "牧场"等，描写其生活的情节中可能也有一些民俗，风情，宗教之类的附会之物，却可能仍然无法让读者感受到真正厚实的"民族特色"，原因在于这些作者对"民族特色"的理解是表象的，肤浅的，或者是刻意的。

When it comes to writing novels, imbuing a work with a real "ethnic flavor" is no easy task. In those works by the people we are often hearing about, even though the names of people and places are all "Sgrol ma" and "Bkra shis" and "Shambhala" and "snow mountain" and "high pastures," and even though the descriptions of life will contain some local culture and customs, religious elements, and other extraneous things, they still can't make the reader feel a real, tangible "ethnic flavor" because these authors have a superficial, shallow, even forced understanding of what "ethnic flavor" is (He 2017:173).

The "Tibetan" linguistic elements here are downplayed: authors can name their characters "Tashi" and write about the mysterious "Shambhala," but this is all so much Tibetan window dressing that does not get to an inner truth of the Tibetan experience. This is the same criticism that Bengali and English writer Ketaki Kushari Dyson aims at Salman Rushdie: "His use of Urdu adds colour to his texts, but does not lead us to an Indian intellectual world" (1993:179). I believe, however, that this "color," *when used in combination with translational language*, has the purpose of revealing the traditional culture, the minority construct, and this mode of translation is a way of highlighting cultural identity. He Dahai goes on to suggest that the characters need to *feel* Tibetan in a way that goes beyond the surface level markers of Tibetan identity. This can be done, I contend, in the

way in which characters are portrayed in Sina Nongbu's work; as conduits of real Tibetan language and, of course, writing.

Kangba, by Dazhen, is another example of a contemporary Sinophone Tibetan novel that makes frequent use of Tibetan words:

琼泽堪布在与曹山话别后特意走到郑云龙身边，说道：“扎西德勒！”郑云龙却不知如何回敬堪布，正束手无策，堪布微笑着用额头轻轻碰了郑云龙的额头。他感到堪布的额头在他的额头上来回摩挲，反复说“雅么松，雅么松”祝他一路走好

Having parted with Caoshan, Qiongze Kanbu walked deliberately over to Zheng Yunlong, and said, "*Bkra shis bde legs!*" Zheng Yunlong didn't know how to respond in kind, and, while he was at a loss, Kanbu smiled and gently touched his forehead against his own. He felt Kanbu's forehead stroking his, as the former intoned "*Yag mo song, yag mo song*" repeatedly, wishing him a good journey (Dazhen 2009:65).

Here, the usage of 扎西德勒 to denote *bkra shis bde legs*, the traditional Tibetan auspicious phrase, while admittedly translational, is by this point cliché; there is no need for a gloss translation, for it has already become a commonplace phrase in standard Chinese. This is the kind of surface-level marker of Tibetanness that He Dahai warns against. It is, however, followed up by more translational language, *yag mo song* 'go well' in what we are told is Khams dialect. The meaning is provided in an intratextual explanation. This is how Chinese can be changed and enriched by Tibetan, as Alai envisioned, and provides an answer to the question asked by the Naxi author, Yang Zhengwen, that I cited at the beginning of this piece: what to do with

the characters? How should they speak? The answer becomes clear. They should speak their own language, and it is up to the author to decide how to write it, how to translate it, or how to gloss it, for the reader to understand. We need to identify those works that are not just Chinese novels wrapped up in Tibetan window dressing, but are actually "Tibetan Chinese," and this can be done with the authenticity of the language, the Tibetanness of the characters.

From an analysis of the Tibetan language within Sinophone Tibetan literature we can move toward building a dataset that would serve as the foundation for a dictionary or glossary of Tibetan words in Chinese. Such a dictionary would be helpful for both encoders and decoders. It would help translators find the right way to transcribe Tibetan words that appear in the source text, and of course to avoid defaulting to Chinese Pinyin (an occurrence that leads to secondary transcriptions - phonetic renderings based on phonetic renderings). This dictionary would also be beneficial to readers, who, encountering an unfamiliar word, would be able to look up the Tibetan "original." It would also help writers find "standard" transcriptions for certain words, perhaps helping to provide inspiration in their creative process of writing Tibet.

In the first instance, as translators, we can make sure to avoid mistakes and unnecessary sinicizations when transliterating Tibetan words from Chinese. A couple of examples of this follow:

骨头，在我们这里是一个很重要的词，与其同义的另一个词叫做根子。根子是一个短促的词："尼。" 骨头则是一个骄傲的词："辖日。" 世界是水，火，风，空。人群的构成乃是骨头，或者根子(Alai 2000:10).

Bone, a very important word here, as is another, *root*, which means about the same thing. But the word *root* in Tibetan is short and abrupt: *nyi*. *Bone*, on the other hand, has a proud sound: *shari*. The natural world is made up of water, fire, wind, and air, while the human world is made up of bones, or roots (Alai 2001:13).

The translation by Howard Goldblatt turns *sha rus* 'flesh and bone', into *shari*, a hybrid transcription that melds Tibetan with Chinese Pinyin, and thus, if this is not taken to be a meta-commentary on Alai's own hybridity, some of the linguistic authenticity is lost.

Another example from the story *A Soul in Bondage* (系在皮绳扣上的魂) by Tashi Dawa reads "人们有事相求时，照样竖起拇指摇晃着，一连吐出七八个"咕叽咕叽"的哀求" (Tashi Dawa 1999:60). This has been translated: "And when people ask a favor they will say, "*gu-ji, gu-ji*" in a plaintive voice" (Tashi Dawa 1989:416). Here, the Tibetan "please" should be rendered in transliteration as *sku mkhyen* (at least in Wylie), but the translator simply uses the Chinese Pinyin spelling of the graphs, giving us what is essentially a Chinese way of pronouncing what should be a Tibetan word. In fact, this example marks an interesting feature of these translations: phonetic translation affords the author the ability to depict dialect pronunciation without requiring them to worry about norms of written Tibetan. Nevertheless, difficulty lingers. How can the reader know how the word that lies beyond the Chinese characters is supposed to be pronounced? Can the reader really read these words as they were intended?

These words also pose a challenge for the translator, who cannot be expected to be *au fait* with numerous languages and romanization systems. A dictionary of these words, with full example

citations (and dialect information where necessary) would be a useful resource. An example entry from such a dictionary might end up looking something like this (to use an earlier example):

沙普 shapu (T *mdza' bo* མཛ་ບོ) n. 朋友 friend

Example (glossing): "放心，那是我最好的沙普 (藏语：朋友之意)，他会照顾好的" "Don't worry, that's my best *mdza' bo* (Tibetan, 'friend'), he'll look after you" (Sina Jundeng 2017:151).

CONCLUSION

There are essentially two assumptions that could be made about the use of Chinese language to compose Sinophone Tibetan writing: either the authors are unwilling to write in Tibetan in the first place, perhaps because they want to reach a wider audience, or they are simply unable to write Tibetan. Literacy rates in Tibetan are low, even in Lhasa. In 1988, only 14.1 percent of the heads of households in Lhasa could read Tibetan proficiently (Ma 2011:308). Besides pointing to the low number of potential readers of Tibetan literature, this suggests that the majority of authors are writing in the script that they know how to use. If an author cannot write Tibetan, they will have no choice but to use the writing system with which they are most familiar: Chinese. Alai identifies as "a Tibetan who writes in Chinese" (Alai 2011:152), but it is worth noting that many Tibetans who live in Tibetan regions of China outside the TAR proper will not have had the opportunity to learn Tibetan script during their schooling. They may have a mother language that is not Chinese, but do not have easy access to a mother

script. Wang Yilan notes how this speaks to the complicated relationship between language and cultural belonging:

I agree that there are differences between Tibetan writers who write in different languages (Tibetan, Chinese, and/or English), but the cultural identity of an author, and more important, of his or her writing, should not be reduced to language only... In this respect, there is a striking similarity between Tibetan writers who write in Chinese, such as Alai, and Indian and African writers who write in English or French: their inability or unwillingness to write their native tongues speaks loudly of their life experiences and ethnicity... (Wang 2013:99).

But is Sinophone Tibetan simply writing in Chinese? I believe we should not be classifying all Chinese as essentialized standard language. Just as we should not essentialize the Tibetan experience, there is Chinese and there is "chinese." Through various modes of translation each "chinese" is not the same. In this way, Chinese can be said, like English, to encompass decentralized codes, denoted by a lower case initial:

We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world. For this reason, the distinction between English and english will be used throughout our text as an indication of the various ways in which the language has been employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world (Ashcroft et al. 1989:9).

We should also distinguish between the standard code of Chinese and the different linguistic codes of Chinese that are influenced by minority languages. Sinophone Tibetan, especially when it is written by the more adventurous authors (frequently the less mainstream, such as Jamyang Sherab and Sina Nongbu), becomes a translational writing: not Tibetan, and not quite Chinese; more a Tibetan-influenced "chinese," with a lower case "c." But whichever path these authors take, these are all valid literary forms. We must be wary not to discount Sinophone Tibetan writing, however as merely/only Chinese, or as a betrayal of true "Tibetanness," for there is always writing behind the writing.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 'a ltos | 阿土斯 |
| 'bru smug po | 布鲁麻婆 |
| 'greng bu | 格绒布 |
| Aba 阿坝, rnnga ba | 阿坝 |
| a ba | 阿爸 |
| Alai 阿来, a le | 阿来 |
| Amdo, a mdo | 阿茂多 |
| a pha | 阿帕 |
| a rogs | 阿若格 |
| bkra shis | 巴曲寺 |
| bkra shis bde legs | 巴曲寺腿 |
| bro | 布罗 |
| bu | 布 |
| byin rten | 比钦 |
| chab mdo | 昌都 |
| Chen'ai Luoding | 尘埃落定 |
| Dan Zhencao | 丹珍草, |
| Dazhen | 达真 |
| Diqing 迪庆, bde chen | 迪庆, 布大钦 |
| ga la btags gla zhabs kyu glu; la 'greng bu le na len; glu len pa | 噶拉巴扎布基鲁; 啦格绒布勒那伦; 鲁伦巴 |
| Gerong Zhuimei | 格绒追美 |
| grwa ba | 格瓦巴 |
| glu | 格鲁 |
| Han 汉 | 汉 |
| He Dahai 和大海 | 和大海 |

Jamyang Sherab 加央西热, 'jam dbyangs shes rab ཇ་央་ཤེས་རབ

Jia Pingwa 贾平凹

kan 看

Kangba 康巴, khams pa ཀංば

khams ཀං

la btags ལ་བත්

lama 喇嘛

Lao She 老舍

lha sa ལྷ་

Liangjiong Langsa 亮炯·朗萨

Lu Xun 鲁迅

mdza' bo ༘

Meizhuo 梅卓, me sgron ༘

minzu wenzue 民族文学

Nahan 纳罕

nan'er 男儿

Naxi 纳西

Nima Panduo 尼玛潘多, nyi ma phan thogs ཉ་མ་ཕན་ཊགས

pad+ma rig 'dzin ༘

pengyou 朋友

rgya རྒྱ

rgyal rong རྒྱལ་

Sanba 三坝

sems pa yongs la dga' zhing ས୍ତେମྚྡ୍ୟ

sgrol ma རྩྗ

shad ma རྩྗ

Shambhala, Xiangbala 香巴拉

sha rus རྩྗ

Shen Congwen 沈从文

Sina Jundeng 斯那俊登

Sina Nongbu 斯那农布

sku mkhyen གླྷ །

Tashi Dawa 扎西达娃, bkra shis zla ba བླା ཕྱଶ རྒྱା

Tsering Wangdu 汪都 Shakya, Cirenxajia 茨仁夏加, tshe ring dbang

'dus shAkya ཁྱ ད ས ཁ ཉ ཁ ཉ

Wang Yiyan 王一燕

Xianggelila 香格里拉, sham b+ha la ལྷ མ ཁ ཉ Shangri-La

xiari 轩日

Xizang zuihou de tuo dui 西藏最后的驮队

yag mo song ཡ ཁ ཉ ཁ ཉ

Yangjin Lamu 央金拉姆, dbyangs can lha mo ད བ ཉ ཉ ཉ

Yang Zhengwen 杨正文

Yidam Tsering, yi dam tshe ring ཕ བ ཁ ཉ

Yinbi de lian 隐蔽的脸

Yingrao xinling de qinsheng 萦绕心灵的琴声

Yunnan 云南

zhabs kyu འ ཁ ཉ

zhuo 卓

Zi qingke 紫青稞